

Yarmouth Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee
 March 28, 2023
 7:00 PM
 Meeting Summary

Name	Attendance
John Auble	Y
Daniel Backman	Y
Crispin Bolese	Y
Emily Bryson	Y
Shanna Crofton Mitchell	N
Judy Colby-George	Y
Hildy Ginsberg	Y
Miriam Markowitz	Y
Tim McGonagle	Y
Karin Orenstein	Y
Neena Panosso	Y
Todd Rich	Y
Bill Richards	Y
Lynne Seeley	Y
Sophie Wentzell	Y
Jamie Whittemore	N
Sarah Witte	Y
Erin Zwirko, Planning Director	Y
Julie Dubovsky, Assistant Planner	Y
Ben Smith, North Star Planning	Y
Logan Capone, North Star Planning	Y

I. Review Meeting Summary from February 28

Motion to accept moved by Sarah Witte and seconded to approve by Crispin Bolese. The Committee unanimously approved the meeting summary from February 28.

II. Review the Findings of the Imagine Yarmouth Visioning Initiative

Erin provided an overview of the visioning phase and the information gleaned from participation, and asked the committee to review the current draft vision statement. A memo summarizing the visioning was also included in the meeting packet. Members related it to an article shared by Karin Orenstein from *Downeast Magazine* in March 2023 entitled, [“What We Talk About When We Talk About Character,”](#) and whether the statement conveys that the town is open to change and opportunities of tomorrow, while being responsible for the present. Members asked about the level of engagement in the visioning process and whether there was any participation bias, which Erin noted was likely simply due to the nature of folks who are already civic volunteers. Ben asked members to consider whether the statement was about present or future Yarmouth. Several people expressed opinions that the statement leaned towards a preservationist, village character focused statement,

and that is important for the committee to incorporate values of “vibrancy” and “connections” to all parts of the community, and to hear perspectives from all parts of the town.

III. Review Inventory Chapters

Bill thanked North Star Planning for making the revisions to the formatting and content of the draft chapters, and other members reiterated that they were much more legible. Logan explained that the team is making sure all the requirements are met and will continue to address comments on the chapters as they come in. Erin asked that when reviewing draft chapters, for members to reflect on:

- What is important and valuable for the average Yarmouth citizen to know on each of these topics?
- Based on the community values and draft vision statement, what should the Town be doing with this information?

A. Housing

Logan provided an overview of the chapter and comments received, and added that the team will be revisiting the housing projections. Erin asked the committee to consider:

- Can you determine whether the existing housing stock in the community is adequate or inadequate? What else might help inform the existing conditions?
- What are the major drivers affecting housing availability in the community?

The consensus was that the chapter adequately conveys that Yarmouth is doing much worse in terms of housing choices and affordability than the region, but that more data to make the regional context clearer, in-out town migration, and local labor force residential data would be helpful. It was also suggested that the chapter include the policies and practices that have exacerbated the problem, as well as housing proposals rejected, to illustrate the disconnect between the community’s “values” and actions against increasing the diversity of the housing stock and affordability. It was suggested to include the amount of developable land, which was calculated for the last comprehensive plan, and to do an analysis of the tax bills to better understand seasonal housing, out of state ownership, and the number of non-conforming lots (predating the 1987 increased minimum lot size).

B. Recreation

Logan provided an overview of the chapter and comments received, noting that ADA accessibility, a spatial analysis of access to open spaces, and on and off road connections in Yarmouth, including the trail network used by school children, will be added to the chapter. Erin asked the committee to consider:

- Yarmouth has a wealth of open space and recreation facilities, but what might still be missing?

- How should Yarmouth appropriately plan for acquiring additional spaces? Do we have the right partnerships?

It was suggested to include data on utilization of existing facilities to determine if any are under-utilized, which may not be available, and if there are unofficial, Town-owned open spaces, like the sledding hill/sand pit, or others adjacent to subdivisions (through open space requirements) that can be officially incorporated into Town facilities. Data should be added on YCS program participation. Members noted that active recreation spaces, like playgrounds, a skatepark, and an enclosed dog park, are missing, and that the town has an abundance of passive open spaces. There was discussion around the terminology of “park” and “open space” and the absence of public places for community gathering all year round. It was also noted that the abundance of preserved open spaces, while a benefit, also lends to the housing pressure and high land costs in town. Noting that percentage of land usage for recreation and open space would be helpful in illustrating that tension of ‘finite’ land.

C. Transportation

Erin noted that the chapter doesn’t presently include the transportation routes that are at risk to the impacts of climate change, and that this should also be considered along with the following:

- What are the critical elements of the transportation network in Yarmouth?
- Can you determine whether the existing network is efficient or inefficient? What might contribute to the inefficiencies?

Ben asked if the draft sufficiently sets the foundation of information to have those policy discussions. It was suggested that the draft include more data on the local system’s capacity to handle more vehicles (such as congestion, average annual daily travel, Level of Service) and any data on public transportation ridership, including the Metro Breez and commuter rail like the Downeaster. Erin noted that she will follow up on obtaining this data. It was also noted that data on commuting during COVID is skewed and should be compared with historic travel trends, and in light of current data on residents’ ability to work from home. The draft is also missing data on the numbers of children riding and walking to school, the routes they take, and how this is representative of community value of transportation alternatives and safe streets. Erin noted that the chapter should include more on the town’s Complete Streets Policy and traffic calming efforts; there was discussion around the expressed desire for safe streets and traffic calming, and efforts to move the Town in that direction.

D. Marine Resources

Erin asked the committee to consider:

- Can you determine whether traditional water-dependent uses are thriving or in decline in Yarmouth? What factors might be contributing to change?
- Can you determine whether there is adequate public access to the waterfront?

- What is the right balance between traditional water-dependent uses and public access?

As a member of the Shellfish Commission, Judy noted that there is a pattern of working waterfront, like for clammers, being lost over time and town prioritization of waterfront for recreation. This pattern is combined by increasing private takings of waterfront for private docks and increasing private dock sizes. Erin noted the tensions over the shoreline in Yarmouth and public access points because they're so few; North Star will add data on the patterns of private docks to the chapter. There was also discussion around public mooring sites, like Madeline Point, and challenges to access. Data will be added to the chapter on lack of parking, long waitlists, and balance of public vs. private access.

IV. Public Comment

A new member of the Affordable Housing Committee, Chris Slader, attended and thanked the Steering Committee for their work on this. Town Councilor Randy Bates also introduced himself and thanked committee.

V. Adjournment